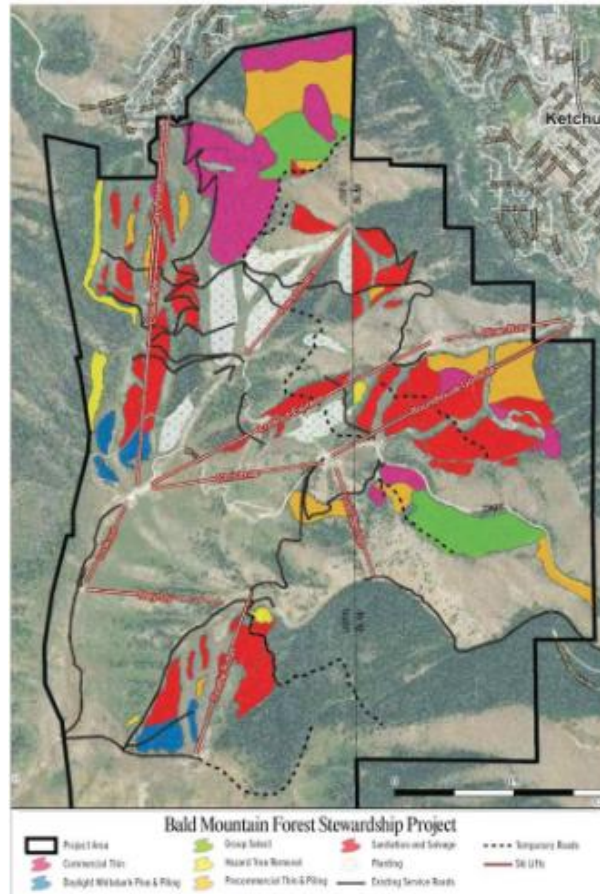


## Major forest project proposed for Baldy

28 November 2019



The Ketchum Ranger District is seeking public comments on a proposed Bald Mountain Stewardship Project, which would thin some tree stands, cut diseased trees and replant some areas to improve forest health on Idaho's most well-known ski area.

According to an 18-page notice of proposed action released by the U.S. Forest Service last week, tree mortality has increased and forest health has declined within the ski area and on adjacent public and private lands.

"In general, these changes can be attributed to an increase in diseases and insects that feed on trees, attributed to extended periods of drought, and long-term increases in stand densities as a result of over 100 years of fire suppression," the document states. "Douglas-fir dwarf mistletoe and Douglas-fir beetle are of primary concern."

The project area covers 6,232 acres: 2,947 acres on the Sawtooth National Forest and 3,285 acres of BLM land. It includes the 3,331-acre Bald Mountain ski area, which is managed by Sun Valley Resort under a special-use permit.

“The purpose of this project is to remove insect infested, diseased, and dead trees; improve forest health; increase resilience to disturbance; reduce hazardous fuels; and initiate regeneration of forest stands within a heavily used recreation area,” the document states.

The project would consist of:

- 639 acres of commercial and 146 acres of non-commercial tree thinning.
- 33 acres of daylighting (opening the canopy) and planting whitebark pine.
- 104 acres of planting.
- 818 acres of prescribed burning.

Of that acreage, “sanitation salvage” is proposed in Douglas-fir stands with moderate to severe dwarf mistletoe and/or with numerous snags on about 280 acres. This treatment would remove all hazardous trees and dwarf mistletoe-infected trees and thin remaining areas. Openings up to two acres may be created. In some areas, dwarf mistletoe-infected trees would be removed in stages to maintain tree cover between ski runs. The most severely infected trees would be removed during the first phase. Future efforts may occur in five to 10 years to remove additional infected trees.

Commercial thinning would occur in younger, healthy Douglas-fir stands that have sufficient trees of merchantable size and reasonable access for removal on about 237 acres.

Group or individual selection thinning would occur in medium-to-large-size (average diameter larger than 10 inches at breast height) Douglas-fir stands with low dwarf mistletoe infection on about 61 acres. Group selection would occur in stands of more than two acres and individual selection in stands of less than that.

“Group selection would create small openings up to about three-quarter acres in size, where all trees would be removed (except for Douglas-fir 20 inches ... and larger) to promote natural regeneration and develop a multi-aged stand,” the planning document states.

“Hazard trees” would be felled in low-density stands and in areas inaccessible to harvesting equipment on about 31 acres. All potentially hazardous trees within 150 feet of roads, structures, facilities and ski runs would be felled. Some logs near existing roads would be harvested if accessible by equipment.

Treatments within the ski area would typically occur from June 15 to Oct. 31. Project activities that require vegetation removal, including timber cutting and skidding, would not be carried out between May 1 and June 15 to avoid disturbance to nesting birds, elk calving and mule deer fawning. Vegetation removal within a single treatment unit up to 40 acres may occur from June 15 to July 31 if wildlife surveys are conducted. If active nests are found, vegetation removal could occur after fledging of young birds.

According to the document, the Forest Service and BLM will complete an environmental assessment to determine whether to prepare an environmental impact statement or a finding of “no significant impact.”

Among other things, the environmental assessment will address how vegetation removal would affect the visual quality of the ski area.

Sawtooth National Forest Supervisor Jim DeMaag and BLM Shoshone Field Office Manager Codie Martin expect to make a decision on the proposed project by July. The project could begin as early as August and completing all proposed treatments could take up to 10 years.

The planning document states that even though comments are welcome throughout the planning process, providing comments by Dec. 22 will allow time for them to be considered during analysis.

Source: [https://www.mtexpress.com/news/environment/major-forest-project-proposed-for-baldy/article\\_ecda7e7c-10a0-11ea-9f0b-7b04fd4a7e76.html](https://www.mtexpress.com/news/environment/major-forest-project-proposed-for-baldy/article_ecda7e7c-10a0-11ea-9f0b-7b04fd4a7e76.html)